

CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF HARLINGTON LIBRARY

Cabinet Member(s)	Councillor Eddie Lavery
Cabinet Portfolio(s)	Cabinet Member for Residents' Services
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Papers with report	Equalities Impact Assessment

HEADLINES

Summary	<p>Hillingdon Council is committed to putting its residents first. Through strong leadership, sound financial management and transforming how it works, the Council will ensure it provides high-quality services residents expect in the most efficient way.</p> <p>The Council currently provides 17 static public library buildings. Harlington library is unique in that it sits within the grounds of Harlington School and while it is open as a public library, it predominantly serves as a school library. The Council does not own the building and pays lease costs for the library to be based within school grounds. A new facility is being built which would see the library move further into the school grounds. The library building will not be visible from the road to the general public.</p> <p>The Council wishes to consult of the decommissioning of Harlington library. Cabinet is asked to consider and approve the future of Harlington library going out to public consultation, and to agree to receive the findings of the consultation at a later meeting to consider prior to any decision.</p>
Putting our Residents First Delivering on the Council Strategy 2022-2026	<p>This report supports our ambition for residents / the Council of: Enjoy access to green spaces, leisure activities, culture and arts</p> <p>This report supports our commitments to residents of: Thriving, Healthy Households</p>
Financial Cost	<p>There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations set out in this report.</p> <p>2022-23 operating costs of Harlington Library are circa. £250k.</p>

Relevant Select
Committee

Residents' Services

Wards

Pinkwell

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Approves for public consultation the proposal to decommission Harlington library;
2. Notes the equalities impact assessment and the measures proposed to mitigate the adverse effects of any decision to close the library;
3. Agrees to consider the findings of the consultation at a future Cabinet meeting in order to decide on the future of Harlington library and notes that a further equalities impact assessment will be commissioned ahead of any final decision.

Reasons for recommendation

Hillingdon Council offers 17 libraries, the largest number of static branches in London (joint with Enfield). It does this in recognition of the value of libraries to communities and the geographical size and shape of the Borough.

Of the 17 branches, only Harlington is based in the grounds of a school and data suggests this dissuades the general population from visiting. As a public library service, we are not attracting the general public to the branch, and data shows the single largest visitor type is students at Harlington school, while children 4-7, adults 18-59 and 60+ are significantly underrepresented. Book borrowing rates are also the lowest of any static library in the Borough. It is therefore appropriate to consider the decommissioning of the library so that the Council and taxpayer resources can be deployed better at the 16 static branches who are successfully delivering as a public library service.

As a statutory service, the Council has a duty to put this out to public consultation.

Alternative options considered / risk management

- Reduce library opening hours – this would still provide primarily for school students and not the wider public, which is the remit of a public library service.
- Volunteer-run library – Harlington would still need rental and caretaking costs as the space is leased by the school; a school-run facility for its students only could be operated either by paid school staff or volunteers but this would be a decision for the school faculty.
- Provide a library at an alternative location in the ward – at present, no suitable alternative assets owned by the Council have been highlighted or identified. Hillingdon will still offer more libraries than the majority of other London boroughs if the decision is to close Harlington, and there are alternative static branches and a Mobile Library that will continue to serve the needs of residents in Pinkwell.

Democratic compliance

Cabinet is the relevant body in the Council's Constitution to propose consultation and make any decision in relation to such proposed changes to Council library services.

Select Committee comments

None at this stage, however, the Residents' Services Select Committee, as part of its important overview and scrutiny role, will consider the consultation on the library at a future meeting and may wish to comment on the matter, reporting back to Cabinet before any final decision.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1. Hillingdon Council continues to put residents first in everything it does, and recognises libraries as a key service that benefits all who live, work or study in the Borough.
2. Data analysis of Harlington library performance was carried out as part of the Equalities Impact Assessment and appears in the EIA appendix to this report with fuller statistical information. Harlington library is well visited by students who attend the school, but has low usage among the wider population that a public library is intended to serve. Book borrowing from Harlington library is the lowest of any static library in Hillingdon, despite not being among the smallest branches in the borough. The majority of visits to the library are among students using it as a school library for computers and revision, during times set out for them to visit during school hours Mon-Fri. Visits on Saturdays are very low compared to weekdays due to the predominant use of the library being among the students at the school.
3. Between Oct 2021 and September 2022 the library service was in a period of COVID-19 recovery, with reduced opening hours and restrictions dissuading some residents from visiting. In this period, the stats appear to show Harlington library performing well (3rd out of 17 static libraries) but in a similar period (mid Oct 2021 to mid Oct 2022), book borrowing data shows Harlington 17th out of 17. This evidence clearly shows that most recorded visits at the library are from school students who are largely not borrowing books.
4. Between October 2021 and October 2022, only 3 libraries had lower active membership than Harlington library. However, those 3 libraries had better reach across the general population, with active membership more evenly distributed among the main user types (e.g. children aged 0-4, 5-7, 8-11; adults 18-59 and 60+) compared to Harlington, whose main active members are students aged 12-14.
5. More recent data collection shows that the above information is a good indication of visits, membership and borrowing at Harlington library. For example, December visit count checks for one week across all libraries show Harlington visits are highest at certain times between 10am-4pm Mon-Fri. Circa 400 visits per day were recorded Mon-Fri, but under 70 recorded for the Saturday when Harlington school students were not timetabled to use the library. The sample week in December 2022 shows that across the service there is a 22% drop in average visits on a Saturday, compared to weekdays. For Harlington, the drop is more than 84%. This demonstrates that without school students counting towards the footfall, Harlington performs below the service average.

6. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been conducted, attached to this report, that identifies a negative impact on the following equalities groups: Asian people (higher than average in the ward), Young people aged 12-17 (predominant users of the library), People with disabilities and Pregnancy/Maternity (who may have to travel further for a public library). Mitigation has been identified on the Equalities Impact Assessment, through the availability of alternative libraries accessible via public transport and the provision of the Mobile library service.
7. If the Council vacates the building on the Harlington school grounds, the school would have exclusive use of the building with new, state-of-the-art facilities. The Council intends to gift book stock and PCs purchased for the public library, for school students to use.
8. The library service is setting out an ambitious strategy which includes a review to put resources where they are most likely to be accessed by residents. The strategy, which will go out for public consultation, acknowledges the need to deliver services where they are needed in cost effective ways to resident that improve outcomes flexibly and responsively. Considering the long-term future of Harlington library does not detract from these aspirations. While it is acknowledged that the decommissioning of Harlington library may be inconvenient, the comprehensive offer of other static locations and a Mobile library will remain.
9. The Council wants to hear from residents, community groups, partners and businesses for their feedback on the future of Harlington library. Cabinet is, therefore, asked to agree that this question is subject to a consultation process to engage meaningfully with residents, the community and businesses to inform the final decision.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations within this report. Should a decision following the consultation be to close Harlington Library, the subsequent restructure and removal of operating costs would contribute circa £250k to the Council's Medium Term Financial Forecast.

RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

The benefit or impact upon Hillingdon residents, service users and communities?

Considering the long-term future of Harlington library and putting this question out via public consultation is part of the wider work of Hillingdon Council to responsibly manage services so that they represent value for money and make the most of the resources available to residents.

Hillingdon has one of the largest networks of public libraries in London, and residents in Pinkwell Ward have two other branches within two miles of Harlington library – Botwell Green library is 1.06 miles away and West Drayton library is 1.54 miles away. Statistics from these two libraries show better general population memberships while also being well used by those who have a student membership profile. Botwell Green library can be reached by the 278, 90 and U4 bus routes from Pinkwell Ward with a bus journey of under 10 minutes; West Drayton library requires two buses, the H98 and 222, and a predicted bus journey of under 20 minutes. Both libraries have

capacity for new visitors, should Harlington library be decommissioned. A Mobile library service will continue to visit locations across the Borough, including Pinkwell Ward, to reach those less able to travel to a static branch.

The proposed consultation stage for the future of Harlington library will seek views from residents, partner organisations and businesses to ensure comments are considered prior to finalising the strategy.

Consultation carried out or required

The report recommends Cabinet approves a consultation stage with residents, partner organisations, the school and businesses to seek views on the future of Harlington library to inform the final decision. The consultation will involve a structured survey available to all residents, promotion through a variety of channels, pro-active contact with partners and engagement with residents' associations. Additionally, Ward Councillors and the relevant Select Committee will be invited to participate in this.

CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and concurs with the financial implications set out above, noting that there are no direct financial implications associated with this report, however, should a decision following consideration of the consultation be to close Harlington Library, it will support the Council's delivery of efficiency savings identified in the Council's budget strategy.

Legal

The provision of a library service is governed by the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. Under section 7, the Council is required to provide "a comprehensive and efficient library service" to anyone residing, working or studying in Hillingdon. Under section 1 the Secretary of State for Culture Media & Sport is responsible for "superintending" national library provision and has powers to intervene in the event that an authority fails to meet its statutory obligations.

In accordance with statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State, any changes to library provision are required to be subject to public consultation and clear rationale needs to be demonstrated before changes are made. This guidance makes clear that local authorities are bound to consider their resources in deciding the level of service to be provided.

This report seeks Cabinet's approval to consult with service users and the public on the proposal to close Harlington Library. In addition, a separate consultation will be carried out with Harlington School because of the impact the closure will have on their pupils. This is particularly important given that the statutory guidance places emphasis on the role of the library service in promoting educational achievement. The outcome of both consultations will be reported back to Cabinet for consideration and further legal advice will be provided to Cabinet at this time.

Infrastructure / Asset Management

Asset Management has been consulted as part of this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL